

Amendments to the Claims:

1. (Previously Amended) A mutant strain of *L. bulgaricus* lacking β -galactosidase activity which carries a non-sense mutation in at least one of the coding sequences of the lactose operon.
2. (Previously Amended) The mutant strain of *L. bulgaricus* as claimed in claim 1, wherein said coding sequence is the sequence encoding β -galactosidase.
3. (Currently Amended) ~~The A mutant strain of *L. bulgaricus* as claimed in claim 1,~~ which was deposited on January 14, 1998 with the CNCM under the number I-1968, said strain lacking β -galactosidase activity and carrying a non-sense mutation in at least one of the coding sequences of the lactose operon.
4. (Previously Amended) A lactic ferment, which comprises at least one strain of *L. bulgaricus* as claimed in claim 1.
5. (Previously Amended) The lactic ferment as claimed in claim 4, wherein said strain of *L. bulgaricus* is combined with at least one strain of *S. thermophilus*.
6. (Previously Amended) A method for preparing a fermented dairy product, which comprises a step during which milk is fermented using a lactic ferment comprising at least one strain of *L. bulgaricus* as claimed in claim 1, in the presence of at least one sugar which can be assimilated by said strain.
7. (Previously Amended) The method as claimed in claim 6, wherein said sugar which can be assimilated is glucose.
8. (Previously Amended) The method as claimed in claim 6, wherein the arrest of fermentation is carried out without cooling of said dairy product.
9. (Previously Amended) A fermented dairy product obtained using a method as claimed in claim 6.

10. (Previously Amended) The fermented dairy product as claimed in claim 9, wherein said product is a yogurt.

11. (Currently Amended) The A mutant strain of *L. bulgaricus* deposited on January 14, 1998 with the CNCM under the number I-1968.

12. (Currently Amended) A lactic ferment comprising which comprises at least one strain of *L. bulgaricus* as claimed in claim 11.

13. (Previously Added) The lactic ferment as claimed in claim 12, wherein said strain of *L. bulgaricus* is combined with at least one strain of *S. thermophilus*.

14. (Currently Amended) A method for preparing a fermented dairy product, which comprises [[s]] a step ~~during which~~ wherein milk is fermented using a lactic ferment comprising at least one strain of *L. bulgaricus* as claimed in claim 11, in the presence of at least one sugar which can be assimilated by said strain.

15. (Previously Added) The method as claimed in claim 14, wherein said sugar which can be assimilated is glucose.

16. (Previously Added) The method as claimed in claim 14, wherein the arrest of fermentation is carried out without cooling of said dairy product.

17. (Currently Amended) A fermented dairy product obtained ~~using a~~ by the method as claimed in claim 14.

18. (Previously Added) The fermented dairy product as claimed in Claim 17 wherein said product is a yogurt.